NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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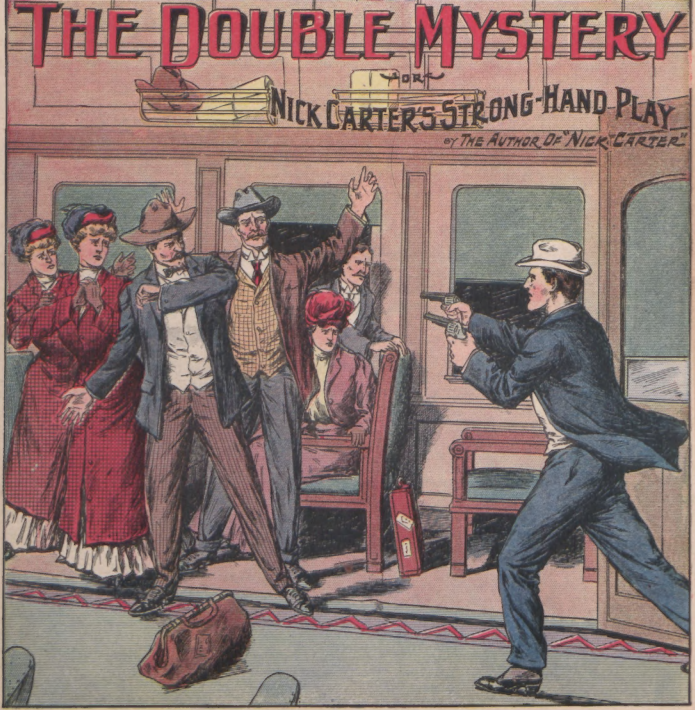
THE DOUBLE MYSTERY

OR

NICK CARTER'S STRONG-HAND PLAY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



At that instant they found themselves looking into the muzzle of two revolvers that Nick Carter was holding at arm's length in front of him, and pointing directly at them.

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A DOUBLE MYSTERY;

Thurs. Apr. 11, 1912,
Tues. Feb. 7th 1921.

OR,

NICK CARTER'S STRONG-HAND PLAY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BODY IN THE CHAIR.

Nick Carter was crossing Madison Square in haste, going toward his home, when he came unexpectedly face to face with a man he recognized, and he stopped abruptly.

The man would have avoided the detective, had it been possible to do so, but it was now too late for that, so he also came to a halt, and, standing squarely upon his feet, holding them somewhat wide apart, and having thrust his hands into his pockets, he showed his gleaming white teeth in a wolfish smile which changed his otherwise handsome face into an apparition of menace and danger.

"So," said the detective curtly, "you are in New York, are you, Juan Santillos?"

"*Si, señor.* I am in New York. The city is a large place. I have only just arrived. It is somewhat strange that I should encounter you almost at the moment of my arrival."

"Why are you here, Santillos?"

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Because it pleases me."

"If I believed that your reply stated your only reason for being here," said the detective, "I should offer no objection to your presence. But as I do not believe you, I will suggest that you can get a train out of town at almost any hour of the day. I would also advise you to take one of them with the least possible delay."

"Am I to construe your remark as a threat, Mr. Carter?" asked the Spaniard, with another of his cruel smiles.

"You need not take the trouble to construe it at all," replied the detective coldly. "I will make you a plain statement that can have but one construction: If you remain in New York long enough for me to encounter you again, I shall cause your arrest. The State of Montana wants you, and you will have short shift if they get their hands on you out there."

The detective started to move on, but the Spaniard made a deprecating gesture.

"One moment, Carter, if you please."

"Well?" said Nick, halting a second time.

"I would like to remain here three days."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"Will you allow me three days?" insisted the man.

"No; nor three hours. I don't want you in New York. If you remain here, I shall arrest you and take you to Montana."

"You are very hard, Carter."

Nick looked at his watch.

"It will take me ten minutes to get from here to my house," he said. "I will wait fifty minutes after I arrive there. At that time—one hour from now—I shall telephone to police headquarters, and you will be placed under arrest as soon as found after that."

"But——"

The detective turned on his heel and strode away; and the Spaniard, after watching his departing figure for a moment, shrugged and smiled again, and then, with a deprecatory gesture of his hands, continued on his own way across the park toward the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"Chick," said the detective, as soon as he entered the house and passed on to his study, "I just met Loco Juan Santillos in Madison Square."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes, I ordered him to leave town at once—but I haven't the least idea that he will go."

"Probably not. He isn't the sort that is very easily driven about at the will of another, and whatever his shortcomings are, fear isn't one of them; eh?"

"No. He isn't afraid of anything."

"I don't suppose you asked him how long he had been here, Nick?"

"No; and he would not have told me if I had done so. He said that he had only just arrived; but he lied about that."

"No doubt."

"It is a pity that Richard Glenn wouldn't permit him to be prosecuted for that affair of his. The fellow hates Glenn, and he is as dangerous as a venomous snake. It is certain, also, that he is here for no good purpose. Where is Patsy?"

"Out on the Maxwell case."

"And Ten-Ichi?"

"On the same case. They are both anchored to it for a week, I think."

"When I parted with Santillos, he went directly to the Fifth Avenue Hotel. It is more than likely that he is stopping there, or, at least, that he had an appointment to meet somebody there. Put on your hat and stroll down there, Chick."

"All right. Any particular orders?"

"No; only if you do find Santillos, keep an eye on him till he leaves town, or, at least, until we know that he has no intention of doing so."

Chick had not been gone from the house twenty minutes before Joseph entered the study to announce that a messenger was below, waiting to see the detective, with a verbal message which he had been instructed to deliver in person.

Descending to the reception-room, the detective found the valet of Richard Glenn awaiting him.

"My master sent me," said the man, "to tell you that a most unfortunate thing has occurred, and that he would appreciate it if you would go around to see him at once. If I may add a word to the message, sir, I would urge you to do so, for I have never seen the master so broken up as he was when I left him."

"Indeed! Do you know what has happened, Paul?"

"No, sir. I have no idea at all. I had been out on some business for him. I returned at two o'clock, and went at once to his room, where he sits all the time, as you know."

"Yes. Go on."

"Being a cripple and unable to walk about, as you know, he always keeps piles of books——"

"Yes, yes. I know all that. What happened?"

"His books were scattered about the room exactly as if he had been playing ball with the lot; or as if he had been amusing himself by throwing them at somebody's head."

"I see. And that is doubtless what had happened. He had had a caller?"

"I didn't wait to find out. He sent me off for you post-haste, and I ran out of the house and came here as quickly as I could. Will you come?"

"Yes. Hasten back and say to him that I will be there at once. I shall make a few alterations in my appearance, Paul, so do not be surprised if you do not know me at once."

The detective returned to his own room and swiftly made changes in his appearance, so that when, fifteen minutes later, he descended the front steps, he seemed to be merely a middle-aged gentleman of prosperous condition who looked as if he might be a banker, or a lawer, or a merchant.

Under ordinary circumstances it would not have occurred to him to adopt a disguise for making such a call as this one, but his encounter with Juan Santillos had warned him that undoubtedly Richard Glenn, and also his daughter, Carmen, were in immediate danger.

Juan Santillos, the Mexican-Spaniard, hated one and loved the other, in his own wolfish way, and Nick had no doubt that his presence in the city was a menace to both.

In what manner the two passions, hate and love, would manifest themselves, Nick did not in the least know; but that Santillos would do his utmost to injure the father and to destroy the daughter, if he could not win her, the detective had no doubt.

He was not, however, prepared to face the swift consequences of Santillos' vengeance.

The house where Richard Glenn lived with his daughter, and where he passed his entire life among his books at a window where the sun could shine in upon him, was located in one of the side streets just off from Fifth Avenue, below the park, and it did not take the detective very long to walk the distance.

But as he turned the corner out of Madison Avenue toward the house, he discovered at once that Paul, the valet, was standing on the steps in front of the house, evidently awaiting his appearance, and that he was now waving frantically for the detective to hasten.

He did so.

He had quickened his gait almost to a run when he arrived—to find that the face of the valet had become drawn and haggard since he had seen it, that the man's eyes were staring and frightened, and that he was trembling with rage and fright.

"What is it, Paul? What has happened?" demanded the detective, as he approached the steps.

"Murder!" was the single word of reply.

"What!" exclaimed Nick. "Who——"

"The master. Mr. Glenn. Come!"

He turned and darted up the steps into the house, holding the door open for the detective to pass and then closing it carefully after him. Then he ran up the steps to the great front room on the second floor, which was a mixture of library, sleeping-room, and living-room for the accommodation of the crippled invalid; and here he threw the door ajar and stepped back so that the detective could precede him.

Nick crossed the threshold—and stopped.

"Stand where you are, Paul," he commanded; and then, with swift, comprehensive glance, he took in the condition of the room with its now silent occupant.

For Richard Glenn was dead.

He was lying back, almost at full-length, in the invalid's chair near the window, toward which his wan face was half-turned. His slippered feet were pressed against the foot-brace of the chair. The hilt of a heavy knife, such as the Mexican knife-throwers make use of, protruded from his side, and it appeared as if the effect of the weapon had been to kill Richard Glenn instantly.

Nick comprehended these facts almost at a glance, and then turned his eyes from place to place around the room.

It was as Paul had attempted to describe it in the few words he had exchanged with the detective at the latter's house.

Books were scattered everywhere about the floor, as if they had been hurled by somebody—by the invalid, in fact—at a person who had intruded upon him. Some were half-open; others stood on end; some had their leaves crumpled beneath their own weight; and the revolving bookcase which stood within reach of the invalid's chair had been almost denuded of them.

But nevertheless, it was at once evident to the practised eye of the detective that none of this rage of book-throwing had occurred at the time of the murder. If that had been so, the silent form upon the chair would not have been lying in the peaceful attitude it now had assumed; there would have been some evidence of the old gentleman's rage, either in his attitude or in the expression of his dead face.

As it was, there was no such suggestion at all.

Nick remembered, too, that Mr. Glenn had seen his valet and sent him forth on the errand, *after* the episode of the book-throwing; and now it appeared as if his paroxysm of anger had entirely passed before the blow was dealt him which resulted in his instant death.

He crossed the room and stood beside the body.

Then he motioned to the valet to join him there.

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBLE MYSTERY.

There was absolutely nothing in the room or about the dead body, save the one fact of the character of the murderous knife, to indicate who had been there, or to suggest who had committed the deed, although the detective had no doubt concerning that point at all, remembering the significance of his encounter an hour earlier in the day, while he was crossing Madison Square.

"Where is Miss Carmen Glenn?" asked Nick of the valet, as soon as the man was beside him.

"I do not know, sir. I haven't an idea."

"Where should she be—where was it her habit to be at this hour of the day?"

"In this room with her father, or in her own rooms, sir."

"Did you discover this crime as soon as you returned from your call upon me?"

"Yes, sir."

"The appearance of the house as we entered it—so quiet was it—would indicate that you had not yet given the alarm."

"I have not, sir. I have not. So far as I know, we are the only persons, aside from the murderer, who know that a crime has been committed."

The detective nodded.

"Look about you, Paul; at the room generally."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me if everything looks about as it did when you last saw the room, just before you left it to go in search of me."

"Everything is precisely the same, so far as I am able to determine, sir."

"Think hard on that subject. Did these scattered books lie in the same places where they are now?"

"I think so. If there is a difference, it is not apparent to me."

"How does it happen that there is no butler in the hall below?"

"Mr. Carter, there are only four servants in the house beside myself, and they are women. The cook, the housemaid, the waitress, and Miss Carmen's maid. There are no others. There never has been since I have been valet to Mr. Glenn—and that is now five years."

"Where are all those servants at the present moment?"

"I suppose they are below, somewhere, sir. I do not really know; but at this time of the day——"

"Yes. Never mind explaining. Go down-stairs and see if you can find any of them. Compose your face before you start, so that it won't tell more than your tongue does."

"Yes, sir."

"Say nothing for the present of what has happened, but ask, in a natural tone, who has been to the door to admit a caller since you went out—and also after you left the house on that first errand. It was during that absence of yours, which we will call the first absence, that the book-throwing episode occurred, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And during your second absence that the murder was committed."

"Yes."

"Make careful inquiries among the servants concerning anything that happened during those two absences of yours. Find out if any one came to the house, and who came. When you have accomplished all that, return here to me."

"Yes, sir."

"And now, before you go, direct me to Miss Carmen's sitting-room."

"Miss Glenn's suite is directly above this one, sir. The sitting-room is over this room; the dressing-room, sleeping-room, and bath adjoin it in the order I have named."

"Very good. I will seek her alone. I will close and lock this door as I go out. When you return, wait for me at the door."

The detective rapped at first gently, and then with more force, upon the door of the suite of Miss Carmen Glenn, but notwithstanding a third summons, he received no response, and at last tried the handle of the door, turned it, and entered the sitting-room that has been already referred to.

There was no one there. A glance told the detective that much.

He passed to the communicating door of the dressing-room, and there he called out the name of the young lady in a voice that should have penetrated to the uttermost length of the suite.

Receiving no reply, he entered, first the dressing-room, then the sleeping-room, and at last, after again rapping, he opened the door into the bathroom.

Carmen Glenn was in none of them, and he returned to the sitting-room, looking swiftly around him at the others as he passed through them.

There was nothing anywhere to indicate a hasty departure. The rooms appeared to be in perfect order, so far as he could determine. Everything looked as if the regular occupant had merely stepped out of them for some purpose of her own which did not now appear.

At a desk in one corner of the sitting-room, the position of the chair, of the pens and blotter, suggested that the young lady had been engaged in writing; but if she had indited a letter, she had also taken it away with her when she went out.

On the table in the center of the room were several pairs of gloves that had been thrown down carelessly, as if their owner had been engaged in making a selection from among them before she took her departure; and that, of itself, indicated that there had been no haste about her going.

Nick left the rooms and descended the stairs to the second floor, arriving there just as the valet returned from his visit to the servants' quarters.

"Well?" he asked.

"Miss Glenn left the house soon after I did——"

"Soon after you did so the first time, or the second time?" the detective interrupted.

"After I went out the first time."

"So it is not likely that she was in the house at either of the times that interest us; that is, when your master threw the books at somebody who entered his room, or at the time of the murder."

"She went out before either of those things could have happened, sir. The housemaid says that she left the house very soon after I did."

"Where is her own particular maid?"

"She went out with Miss Glenn."

"And how did they go? On foot, or in one of the carriages?"

"They walked."

"Now, who has called at the house during the day?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Eh? It is quite evident that *somebody* has called. Don't you think so, Paul?"

"Yes, sir. What I mean to say was that the servants are not aware that anybody has called at the house at all."

"You mean that none of them has been to the door in response to a ring at the bell?"

"Yes."

"How long is it now since you went out that first time, Paul?"

"I should say that it is about two hours."

"Did you ask the servants how they had passed the time since then?"

"Yes. They have not left the other part of the house at all."

"Not even to ascertain if their master wanted anything?"

"That was not necessary. In the first place, not one of them was aware of the fact that I had gone out at all, and, again, there is an electric bell with a flexible cord which I always placed within the master's reach when I left him. With it he could summon the housemaid or the waitress to him by a mere press of the button. During all the time that has elapsed, the housemaid and waitress have been engaged in polishing the silver. They are at it now."

"How do they know about the absence of Miss Glenn?"

"Miss Glenn's maid went to tell them that she was going out with her mistress."

"And how do you know that they departed immediately after you left the house?"

"By the time that was given me. The waitress remembered the time when Miss Glenn's maid took the message to her that they were going out."

"I see. Did the maid mention where they were going?"

"To do some shopping. She said no more than that."

"Did she mention what time they would return?"

"No; only that they would not be absent long."

"Then we may expect them to return at any moment. Now, Paul?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will have to go back to the servants and break the news to them concerning what has happened. In the meantime, I will make use of the telephone to inform the police, and also to summon the coroner. I will remain in the house until the police take charge, and also until Miss Glenn returns. This will be a terrible blow to her, Paul."

"Awful, sir. I never saw such worship as Miss Glenn bestowed upon her father. She never seemed to have a thought that wasn't for his comfort and content."

"Yes, I know. You remember that they were separated since she was five years old until only a few months ago. Now go and do as I bade you. When it is done, return to me."

"Yes, sir."

"And tell the servants to remain where they are for the present. They need not come into this part until they are called to do so. I wish as little noise made about this affair as possible, so tell them as much."

"I will."

The police came in due time; also the coroner; and with the latter Nick went again to the room where the crime had been committed.

But there was nothing to be discovered more than he had seen the first time, although he was more than ever strongly convinced that the knife that had killed Richard Glenn had been thrown at him from the door.

He illustrated his belief to the coroner.

"I know already—at least, I know to my own satisfaction," he said, "who it was who committed this crime; but there does not exist the slightest proof of his guilt that would be satisfactory to a jury. His known enmity and hatred of Richard Glenn and his known career and character would sum up all there is against him."

"But if you know him——"

"Aye, I know him all right. I met him in Madison Square this morning. I think that he must have turned about and hastened to this house, and committed this crime after I saw him, too."

"You do?"

"Yes. It is evident to me that Juan Santillos—that is his name—had already been here. Just how he entered the house is at present a mystery, although it would not be difficult for a man who is expert with locks to let himself into a house of this sort, or past a door like the one down-stairs."

"I grant you that."

"The condition of the room indicates that he and no other had been here. There is not another man alive, than Santillos, in whose presence Glenn would have lost his temper to the extent of throwing books at his head."

"I suppose you are reasonably sure of that, Carter?"

"Certainly. My idea is that Santillos saw the valet go out when he left the house the first time. Doubtless, he also saw Carmen leave the house. Convinced, then, that Glenn was alone for the moment, and possibly knowing something about the disposition of the servants in the house, he used a key that he had provided, and entered."

"That sounds probable," admitted the coroner.

"The interview was rather stormy, judging from the appearance of the books. I can hear Glenn ordering the intruder out of the house, almost."

CHAPTER III.

THE ABDUCTION OF CARMEN GLENN.

"I don't suppose, at that time," continued the detective musingly, "that Santillos had an idea of killing Glenn—at least, not just then; but he had some definite and particular purpose in calling. There is no doubt of that."

"Probably not."

"And it was the mere mention of that purpose which threw the old man into a rage, so that he denuded his revolving case of books to throw at the fellow's head."

"I see. One would suppose that you know what that purpose was."

"Oh, I think there is no doubt about the purpose."

"What was it?"

"He probably told Glenn that he wanted to marry his daughter Carmen; and, by the way, the two are remote cousins. Carmen's mother's name was Santillos, and she was cousin to Juan Santillos' father. His suggestion of

such a wish would account for the throwing of the books."

"But not for the throwing of the knife."

"No. I think that I am responsible for that."

"*You!*"

"Yes. In a way, that is."

"How in the world do you mean?"

"I have just told you that I met Santillos in the square, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"I ordered him to leave the city at once. I told him that I would arrest him and send him to Montana, where he happens to be wanted, if he did not leave within the hour. He begged for three days' time, and I refused to grant it; so it is my opinion that he merely turned about, came back here, let himself into the house again, ascended the stairs softly, opened that door silently, so that the old man was not disturbed, and from that position threw the knife into Glenn's heart. After that he probably went quietly away again, as silently as he came, leaving, as you observe, no trace behind him—save the one: the knife."

"Is the knife his? Do you recognize it?"

"No. But it is the kind that he uses, and I know him to be one of the most expert knife-throwers in the world. He could make a handsome salary on the stage at that sort of exhibition."

"But ought you not to be in search of him now, Carter?"

"I am. I sent Chick out on his trail at once, after I returned to my home after meeting him. It is entirely as well as if I had gone myself."

"You think that Chick will find him?"

"Frankly, I do not."

"Why not?"

"Think a moment. Santillos knows that I would recognize his work in this instantly. He knew that I would know at once that he did the job. He came back here to commit this murder deliberately, knowing that I would know he did it—and it is therefore quite certain that he had a method already prepared for immediate escape."

The coroner acquiesced.

"He doubtless had a plan already laid for losing his identity at any moment he pleased. He has merely put it into execution a little sooner than he expected to do, that's all."

"He is a cold-blooded scoundrel! That is what he is!"

"Oh, there is no doubt of that. Not the least. This sort of thing is only play to such a man as he is. He is more dangerous than a snake; more deadly than the poison of a cobra."

"But you will catch him, Carter."

"Yes. I think so—ultimately. But I am dreading now something that is almost worse than this murder."

"What is that?"

"Carmen has not returned to the house yet."

"But what of that? Do you think——"

"I am afraid that the plotting of Santillos extended to her, coroner."

"You don't mean to say that he has found a way to abduct her in broad daylight, in the streets of New York, do you?"

"I mean something very much like that—yes. She went out, soon to return. There has been ample time for her to do her errands. She has not returned. Santillos saw her leave the house, doubtless. What is it, Paul?"

The valet had approached the door and was now standing quietly on the threshold, waiting until he should be addressed.

"Clarice has returned," he said.

"Miss Glenn's maid?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"In the library, sir. I told her to wait there until you saw her."

"Quite right, Paul. Will you accompany me, coroner?"

"Yes. Thank you."

They found the maid in the library, striding up and down the floor, evidently laboring under great excitement.

"I am Mr. Carter, Clarice," said Nick, remembering that he was in disguise and that she would not recognize him at once. "Where is your mistress?"

"Alas, sir, I do not know."

"Not know! You went out with her, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. We went to Altman's store. I had a few purchases of my own to make, and we separated inside the store, agreeing to meet at the glove counter later. I returned there and waited, but she did not come. At last, thinking that she had missed me somehow, and gone on home, I came here. What does it all mean, Mr. Carter?"

"I suppose, Clarice, that you have been told of what has happened here?"

"Yes, sir; oh, yes. It is terrible. The poor master! And Miss Carmen! It will kill her when she knows about it."

The girl began to sob, and Nick left her alone for a time; but at last he said to her:

"I wonder what sort of a detective you would make, Clarice?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"This: You know about what purchases your mistress intended to make to-day, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, therefore, you are reasonably certain what departments and counters in that store she would have visited to make those purchases; eh?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you have got nerve enough and judgment enough to return to that store at once and to make inquiries of the clerks throughout each department where your mistress could have gone. Do you think you could do that for me?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, indeed, I could."

"Then go at once. Lose no time. Hasten there as quickly as you can. Try to recall everything that your mistress intended to look at while she was there. Ask all the questions about her that you can think of. Particularly, try to find out from the clerks, many of whom knew her by sight, doubtless, if any person approached her and spoke to her while she was in the store. You can accomplish that much better than I could do it, for I would have to find out first where she went while she was in the store, and you know that approximately, already. Can you do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go at once; and when you have finished your inquiries, no matter what the result may be, go to my house."

"I will, sir."

"If I am not there, wait for me. I shall wish to question you."

"Yes, sir."

After the maid had gone out on her errand, the detective turned to the coroner again.

"It begins to look like some sort of an abduction, doesn't it?" he asked.

"It does, Carter, for a fact."

"Of course, we cannot at the present moment guess how it was done, but the probability is that Carmen was enticed away from the store by some subterfuge connected with the maid. For example, if a stranger rushed up to her and in an excited manner exclaimed: 'Are you Miss Glenn?' she would have replied at once that she was Miss Glenn; and then if the stranger informed her that her maid had met with an accident somewhere and had sent for her to go to her, it would not occur to her to inquire the particulars, would it?"

"Not likely."

"Even to the extent of inducing her to enter a carriage. It all looks like rather a slick day's work on the part of Santillos."

"Your only hope at the present moment is that Chick has managed to get on the man's trail, isn't it?"

"That is my greatest hope at the present moment. It isn't the only one. I shall leave you now, coroner. There is nothing more that I can do here. I will telephone to Richard Glenn's lawyer to come here and assume charge of affairs."

The detective returned to his own home, where, after divesting himself of the disguise he had so unnecessarily worn, he seated himself to await the return of Chick, or at least to hear from him.

But the time passed, and Chick did not appear, nor did any message come from him.

At five o'clock Joseph announced the maid, Clarice, and Nick had her up to his study at once.

"It was not until the very last inquiry I made of the clerks that I discovered anything," she said, dropping into the chair which Nick indicated for her to take. "But then, as I had given up finding out anything at all, I approached one of the clerks who happens to know me. It was at a counter where I did not expect any information, too."

"That is apt to be the case," commented Nick. "Go on."

"The clerk—a Miss Allison—called out to me:

"'Why, Clarice, I thought you were injured. I thought you were knocked down and trampled upon by a crush at the door, and were carried outside in a fainting condition.'

"And then, sir, she told me that Miss Glenn was standing at her counter, chatting with her, when a man rushed up to her and told her that I had fallen as she had described, and that I had sent for my mistress; and that is all that I could find out."

"Couldn't you find anybody who saw your mistress after that moment?" asked Nick.

"Not a soul. I asked everybody. I went to the manager, and he helped me. We could find out nothing at all. Nobody seems to have seen Miss Glenn from the time she left that counter after being told that I had been hurt."

"You have done very well, all the same, Clarice," said the detective. "Your mistress was probably taken to a carriage. She was told that you were inside. As she endeavored to enter, some one might have pushed her from the outside, and at the same time somebody seized her from the inside. The rest would be easy so long as she was not permitted to cry out."

"Then you think, sir, that she has been carried away?"

"I certainly do."

"But who could have done it, Mr. Carter?"

"The same person who murdered her father, doubtless. Do you happen to know if anybody has been annoying Miss Glenn of late?"

"Yes, sir, I do. A man—a Spaniard—whom she hated. She told me all about him."

"Santillos was his name. I know him. What did he do to annoy her?"

"He wrote letters to her every day. He begged to be allowed to see her. He threatened her if she did not consent."

"And how long has that sort of thing been going on?"

"For weeks, sir—weeks. I begged her to tell you about it, but she always replied that she did not want to trouble you, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S NEW IDEA.

"If your mistress had come directly to me, in the first place, as soon as she began to receive those letters, the act would probably have saved her father's life, and it certainly would have avoided the present predicament," said the detective thoughtfully, when the maid uttered that statement. "Do you know what she did with those letters? Did she destroy them?"

"No. She threw them aside. I gathered them up. I have saved them, for I intended to show them to you, if you happened to call at the house to see Mr. Glenn, as you sometimes did."

"That was thoughtful of you, Clarice. Where are the letters?"

"In my room at the house, sir."

"Very good. It isn't dark yet. I will go there with you to get them."

The detective left a note for Chick, in case he should return during his absence, and then went out with the maid; but just before he left the house he returned to his own room and secured a box he wanted, for an idea had occurred to him that had possibilities, although he had not as yet finally determined upon putting it into execution.

The house where the crime had been committed was, of course, in charge of the police; and there was also a representative of the lawyer there; but the detective, accompanied by the maid, had no difficulty in gaining admittance.

The coroner had given permission to the undertaker to proceed with his duties, and already the body of the victim had been prepared for the last rites that were to be performed in its service.

"You may take me directly to your room, Clarice," said the detective, when they entered the house. "I will look at the letters there."

There were several of them, and they were one and all couched in about the same language.

Each one begged for an interview. Each told and reiterated the love that the writer had always entertained for Carmen—and in this, at least, Nick had no doubt that Santillos spoke nothing but the truth.

But there were threats against the life and happiness of her father through them all—threats that were suggested rather than uttered, and which were couched in the softest phrases, but which were nevertheless stated in no uncertain terms.

The burden of the letters was in their continued beseeching for an interview.

They one and all begged her to meet him during the middle of the day, in some public place, so that—as the writer suggested—she need feel no fear of him.

The grand salon at the Hotel Mammoth was the place of meeting most frequently suggested. The Waldorf was mentioned once, but in such a way that Nick decided that it was merely an afterthought, because the Waldorf is somewhat nearer to the house where Carmen lived.

Otherwise, they contained no further clue than the detective already possessed.

"Did Carmen reply to any of these letters?" he asked of the maid.

"No, sir, not at all."

"Did the man ever call here? Even to the extent of presenting himself at the door?"

"Not to my knowledge, Mr. Carter."

"Do you know if she ever saw him when she went out? Did she ever encounter him on the street that you know about?"

"Only once, and then he did not see her."

"How do you know that?"

"Because she said so."

"Tell me what she said about it."

"She returned one day from a visit at the florist's—it was the day before yesterday, sir—and the moment she was in her own rooms she said to me:

"'Clarice, I met that terrible cousin of mine to-day. I almost came face to face with him; but, fortunately, he did not see me.'

"I asked her if she was sure about that, and she said she was. She had seen him coming toward her on the street, and had turned into a store and waited until he passed. Then she took a cross street, and so avoided him."

"Is that the only time?"

"Yes, sir. It is the only one, at least, that I know about."

"Did Carmen fear the man very much, do you think?"

"No, sir, I do not. She did not fear anything at all. I never saw anybody as fearless as she always was."

"Yes, I know that."

"She used to laugh at his letters—after she got through frowning upon them."

"Tell me what she said about the man himself."

"I think she pitied him in one way. I have heard her say that he was good to her, after his own fashion, during the years that she was in his care. Will you tell me how that was, sir? Miss Glenn never explained it to me."

"Santillos stole her from her parents when she was five years old. He was himself only sixteen at the time, but he was precocious and like a man grown in many respects. He took her to Europe, where he placed her in a convent, and he left her there until she was twenty. In the meantime, she had forgotten who she was, and he succeeded in convincing her that he was her elder brother. She lived under the name of Carmen Santillos all the time she was at the convent, and the Mother Superior supposed that she had been placed there by her brother.

"Then he took her away, when she was twenty, and brought her to this country again. For two years they traveled, while he was having a house completed for them to live in, out in Montana.

"But in the meantime she had grown so beautiful that he fell in love with her in earnest, and so, after he had taken her to the home in Montana, he told her the truth about herself; he admitted that he was not her brother, but only a distant cousin. He tried to get her to marry him.

"That is practically the entire story of her life.

"In his way, he was good to her, I suppose, as she said to you; but he swore to her that she should never see her father, whom he confessed to her was alive, unless she did so as his wife—and it happened to be just at the time when he had determined to force her into an unwilling marriage when her father sent after her. He had succeeded in obtaining some definite information about her at last, through discovering the convent where she had lived for fifteen years of her life."

"What a terrible thing it was to do—what that man did, I mean."

"Yes. I think there is no doubt that he loved her, and that he loves her now; but it is the love of a hyena instead of a man. However, I do not think that she is in any immediate danger; at least, not for a few days—possibly weeks."

"Won't he take her back again to that place in Montana?"

"I do not think so. There are reasons why he would prefer to give that section of the country a wide berth. What I fear is——"

"What, sir?"

"Santillos owns large estates in the State of Guerrero, in Mexico. Guerrero is a wild place. There are many parts of it where white men—as we know them—do not yet have never been, and returned to tell about it. I fear that he will take her there if I do not succeed in stopping him."

"And if he should? What then, sir?"

"If he should succeed in getting her safely into that country, it would be almost impossible for anybody to rescue her—even to find her at all."

"Then there is no time to lose."

"Miss Clarice?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have satisfied me to-day that you are a girl with brains, and also of courage."

"Thank you, sir."

"I wonder if you have got sand enough to help me out a little more?"

"Yes, sir. I will do anything in the world for Miss Glenn. I love her."

"I am assured of that. But what I ask you to do—if I do ask it—will require a considerable amount of courage."

"I will not falter, sir. Tell me what it is."

"I notice that you are about the same height and figure of your mistress, Clarice."

"Yes, sir. Her clothes fit me perfectly."

"That has been fortunate; eh? It is still so—for what I wish you to do."

"I do not know what you mean, Mr. Carter."

"I will tell you presently. I have not quite decided in my own mind to do the thing I have thought about. You resemble your mistress somewhat, too, Clarice; at least, you would do so if you were dressed in her clothes. Don't you think so?"

"Miss Glenn is very beautiful. I am not, sir."

"Pardon me, Clarice; I am not saying this to compliment you idly, but you are also beautiful. With a few touches I could make you look so exactly like your mistress that the resemblance might deceive her father, were he living."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"But why should you do such a thing? Why would it be any advantage to make me look so like my mistress that people would be deceived?"

"That is what I am turning over in my mind at the present moment. It is what I have not entirely decided about. Suppose we find out what we can do in that line while I am doing my thinking? What do you say to that?"

"I am quite willing, if it is your wish."

"Very well; I will wait here for you."

"What am I to do in the meantime, sir?"

"Go into your mistress' rooms. Select from among her things a costume in which she looks particularly well; a street costume, I mean."

"Yes."

"Put it on. Then arrange your hair—it is the same color—exactly as she wears hers; and when you have done all that, return here to me."

"Will it be right, under the circumstances, for me to help myself to her things?"

"Perfectly right, since I request it, and since it is done in her interests."

"You said a street costume?"

"Yes. Go, now; and make haste."

Nick almost uttered a gasp of surprise when, half an hour later, Clarice returned to him, after the change had been wrought.

She had rearranged her hair as Nick had directed; she had adopted a costume for the street which Carmen was particularly fond of; she had added a few ornaments, such as Carmen was in the habit of wearing, and the whole made up a very beautiful young woman who did not look in the least like a servant, and who already suffi-

ciently resembled her mistress to have passed readily as a sister.

Then [illegible] returned to the box he had brought to the house with him.

He directed Clarice to seat herself in a chair under the electric light, and, with the contents of the box, he began to make touches here and there until, after half an hour more, he left off and stepped back to view his handiwork.

"Look at yourself in the mirror, Clarice," he said, with a smile.

She arose obediently and stepped in front of the mirror.

Then she uttered a cry of surprised dismay, and whirled in her tracks, with startled eyes and trembling just a little.

"Mr. Carter!" she cried. "I thought—I thought—"

"What?" he asked.

"I really thought for an instant that Miss Glenn stood behind me, and that it was her reflection that I saw in the mirror," said Clarice, trying to laugh.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CLARICE.

It was not at all surprising that Clarice had felt that way about her reflection in the glass, for Nick Carter had surely wrought a marvelous change in her appearance.

It is true that, before the changes were made, it would not have occurred to a casual observer to say that Clarice could be mistaken for her mistress; there was no actual resemblance—only general ones.

But the detective had been quick to notice these; he had been quick to see the possibilities of a make-up, and he had profited by his discovery.

"But what is it all about, Mr. Carter?" asked the now thoroughly puzzled maid. "I don't understand how I am to assist you merely by resembling my mistress."

"Possibly you cannot do so; possibly you can. It is merely an effort on my part to play a trick upon the person who have stolen your mistress away."

"Do you suppose there was more than one of them? You use the plural."

"One must allow in at the longest of it, of course; but he could not well have accomplished all he has done without assistance, could he?"

"No."

"That is why I made use of the plural. If I thought that Sanzillo had acted entirely alone, I should not have taken the trouble to make you up, Clarice."

"But even now I do not understand."

"It is now still rather early in the evening, Clarice."

"Yes."

"I am going to ask you to return with me to my house now, and to wait there in the parlor for me for half an hour. After that, I am going to take you to dinner at the Hotel Mammoth."

"Why, *Mr. Carter!*"

"What is the matter, Clarice?"

"I am only a lady's maid, sir."

"For to-night you will be the lady, instead of the maid. And while I think of it, you must stop that habit of saying 'sir' to me—for to-night, at least. I am going to address you as 'Carmen,' and if I should encounter any of my acquaintances, I shall introduce you as Miss Glenn."

"But, Mr. Carter, there is one objection which possibly you have forgotten."

"What is that, Clarice?"

"Would it be quite proper, or natural, for Miss Glenn to appear in a public place to-night, so soon after the murder of her father?"

"Decidedly not. But I had not forgotten that. I have managed, through a little influence that I possess, to keep the fact about the murder quiet for a short time. The news of it will not appear until the morning papers are out. The afternoon and evening papers did not have the news."

"You mean that people do not know about the murder yet, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"But they will know in the morning."

"What of that?"

"Many will remember to have seen—as they will suppose—Miss Glenn at the hotel after the murder, to-night."

"Let them remember. They will not think twice about it. If any of them should, they will suppose that at the time they saw Miss Glenn she had not yet learned of her father's death."

"But there is still another objection."

"What; another?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Miss Glenn has many acquaintances whom I do not know by sight."

"What of that?"

"If I should see them, and not know them, I would—cut them, you know."

"We will take that chance."

"And there is still one more reason why I ought not to do this thing."

"Goodness! What is that, Clarice?"

"I am afraid that I cannot play the part. I shall keep forgetting whom I am supposed to be, and will remember only that I am Clarice St. Cyr. I am afraid that I will botch it terribly, Mr. Carter."

"I have no fear of that. Besides, did I not say that I would make a detective of you? You are to begin to-night. You will do the part all right, don't worry."

"Will you tell me one thing?"

"Possibly; what is it?"

"What do you expect to accomplish by this impersonation?"

"I really cannot say that I expect to accomplish anything at all—but I hope that I may. I will tell you all about what I hope to do a little later. I don't care to spare the time just now. Come."

They were not long in returning to the detective's home, and there Nick left Clarice in the parlor while he went to his own room. He was gone quite half an hour, as he had said he would be; but when he did come down and enter the room where she was awaiting him, she looked upon him without recognition.

This fact pleased Nick immensely, for it told him two things: One was that his disguise was perfect, and the other, and more important one, was that she did not know Juan Santillos by sight.

For Nick had made himself up as a perfect counterpart of Santillos; so perfect was the counterfeit that the closest of Santillos' friends might have been deceived.

Once before he had done this very thing, and on that occasion had fooled the men who served under Loco Juan Santillos, in Montana.*

Nick's idea in attempting this double masquerade was rather far fetched, as he had intimated to Clarice; and yet there was just a chance that it might be profitable.

The letters he had read at least assured him that the one-time outlaw was in the habit of frequenting the Mammoth; otherwise, he would not so frequently have mentioned it as a place of meeting.

When men make appointment for meetings by letter, they are sure to select a place which is especially familiar to them.

The detective had an idea that by exhibiting himself in the hotel publicly, and in the character of Santillos, there was a chance that he might be accosted by one of the acquaintances of the Spaniard, if there should happen to be such a person at the hotel—or if one should appear there by any accident.

And again, if there should be any person around who had at any time seen Carmen while Santillos was plotting against her and laying plans for her abduction, she would be another attractive feature of the "show."

The fact that the murder was not yet known; that nobody outside the few concerned had the least idea that there had been an abduction, made all this quite possible; and the additional fact that Santillos appeared to dare to be present in the great dining-room of the Mammoth that night, of all nights, would fill his associates with unnamed terror, if one such should happen to discover him—or the man that was supposed to be he.

You might say that there was not one chance in ten thousand that this plan of Nick's could be productive of any gain whatever; but even so, if there did exist that one chance in ten thousand, or a hundred thousand, even, it was worthy of a trial.

And there was nothing else that Nick could do that night which seemed so well worth doing.

Chick had not returned; neither had he forwarded any message to the house.

Nick did not know what to think of this.

It argued for one of two things: Either the assistant was so hot upon a trail that he had not found an opportunity to send word; or he had met with trouble of some sort, and was prevented from doing so.

Nick was rather inclined to the latter view, too.

He knew Santillos for an exceedingly desperate character; and also as a most cunning foe.

It might be the Spaniard had suspected that Nick would send somebody out after him at once, and that he had found time to put one of his own associates on guard while he himself returned to the home of Richard Glenn to commit the murder.

All there was which the detective could have thought of to do that night in the way of taking up the search for Juan Santillos would have been to go to the Hotel Mammoth; and this he was doing now—in company with Clarice.

But he thought it best to warn her who it was that he represented in the disguise he had adopted, and so, as they took their seats in the automobile, he said to her:

"What do you think of this disguise, Clarice?"

"You are to call me Carmen to-night, Mr. Carter," she corrected him.

"Very true. You are all right. What do you think of this disguise, Carmen?"

"I suppose it is very perfect. At least, I should not have known you. Even your voice, as you spoke to me just now, is different."

"It ought to be. It is the voice of the man I am representing."

"Ah! Then, like myself, you are representing a living character?"

"Yes. Does my appearance suggest nothing to you—Carmen?"

She smiled brightly at him, and replied:

"No. Do you represent somebody whom I am supposed to know?"

"I don't think so. I am supposed now to be no less a person than the writer of those letters we read to-night in your room."

"Really? Do you mean that Señor Santillos?"

"Yes."

"If he looks as you do now, he is a handsome man. But I remember that my mistress—that is, that I have often said that he is handsome."

"Exactly."

* See the preceding issue of the NEW CARTER WEEKLY—"The Passenger on the Night Local."

"How am I to address you, then?"

"As Juan—pronounced Wan. Can you say it?"

"Oh, I speak Spanish quite as well as I do French and English—and Italian, too, for that matter. So you are Juan and I am Carmen. Really, Mr. Carter, you make me forget that I ought to be very sad to-night."

"I wish you to be gay to-night. I wish you to conduct yourself as if there were no troubles in the world. Will you endeavor to do so?"

"Certainly. I do feel gay, to tell the truth—save only when I remember the poor master, who was murdered in such a horrible manner."

"You must not remember it; you must forget it, for the present."

"This is not the first time that I have timed out in this way, Mr. Carter."

"I have suspected as much—Carmen."

"I speak as Clarice now. I was not always a maid."

"I suspected that, also."

"I don't know why I tell you this, unless it is because I feel like myself for the first time in many months."

"You mean that you are properly in your own sphere for the first time in many months, do you not?"

"Yes. Yes. It is a long, sad story, Mr. Carter. Some time I would like to tell it to you."

"Some time you shall. Possibly we can find a way to render it less sad. But you must not think about it to-night. This is to be a night for gaiety and pleasure; a night of adventure, I hope."

"I only pray that it may be a night of success for your efforts, Mr. Carter, and that I may be permitted to contribute to it."

CHAPTER VI.

THE COWBOY IN A DRESS-SUIT.

The time was nine o'clock when they entered the great hotel.

For a time they moved around among the people in the corridors, permitting themselves to be seen by all; and at last they entered the dining-room and found a conspicuous table, from which they could see everybody who entered or left the room, and where they were themselves about the first to be seen by any person who entered.

Nick ordered a very entertaining dinner, for he correctly supposed that Clarice had eaten very little that day, and he knew that in the spirits which the adventure had inspired in her she would lose all appetite.

Nevertheless, they were already several courses, and had arrived at the coffee-stage of the repast, before any important words of note occurred.

And then one of the waiters from below came to him, and, bending over, whispered:

"Are you the senor Don Juan Sanchez, sir?"

"You are evidently quite well assured of that, waiter, or you would not have asked the question," replied the detective. "What do you want?"

By way of reply, the man placed a note on the table in front of Nick, and straightened himself up to wait until the detective had read it.

The note was extremely brief, and there was no signature appended to it whatever. It was:

"Isn't this rather foolhardy? I would like a word with you. Send word by the waiter."

"Where is the party who sent this message?" asked Nick of the waiter.

"At the table in the far corner," was the reply.

"Alone?"

"No; there is another gentleman, with two ladies, at the table. They are one party."

"Very good. Ask the gentleman to come over here, if he cares to do so."

"Yes, sir."

"And, stay; here is something to help you get there."

He placed a dollar in the expectant hand of the man.

"Now, Carmen," he said, "my back is toward that waiter, in the direction in which he is going. I want you to watch him with your sharpest eyes, and tell me everything that he does; and also what the people at the table where he is going do. Don't omit anything."

She did not reply, but Nick saw that her eyes were intently following the man across the room, and presently she began to murmur to him in a low tone:

"The waiter went straight to the table in the far corner. He is there now. He is bending over, and is saying something to one of the gentlemen there. The others—there are three others—appear to be listening. Now the waiter is standing up straight, and the people at the table are talking earnestly together. Now the waiter leans over again. Now he is coming toward us again. He will be here in a moment. The people at the table do not rise."

Then the waiter appeared again.

"Pardon me, sir," said the waiter.

"What! Back already? What is it now?"

"Mr. Carroll wishes to know if you and the madam will join him and his friends over there at their table. Room can easily be made for you."

"Tell him 'no'; not at present. Later, perhaps. Wait a moment."

"Yes, sir."

"How did you know him to be Mr. Carroll?"

"I always listen for names, sir, so that I will know the guests of the hotel. One of the ladies called him by that name."

"I see. You are a wise old chap. Possible there is another dollar for you in my pocket. Now, look here, my man."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't care to turn about and stare across the room like a countryman looking into a shop-window. Can you tell me who the people are at the table with Mr. Carroll?"

"I think so; yes, sir."

"Good. Do so."

"Mr. Carroll is the gentleman nearest this way; next to him is Mrs. Pardoe; opposite Mrs. Pardoe is Mr. Pardoe, and seated next to him is Miss Travers."

"Thank you. You need not mention to them the fact that I made the inquiry."

"Certainly not, sir."

"And you might say to Carroll that I would be glad if he would step over here at once. By the way, how did he happen to recognize us all the way across this room? Do you know that?"

"I think, sir, that he recognized the lady first."

"Ah, indeed! Do you happen to think anything more about it, waiter? If you do, tell it. That dollar is getting bigger. It is growing."

"Well, sir, I hope you won't think I am presuming——"

"I have asked you to talk; therefore, talk."

"Well, sir, I think that the sight of the lady gave him a sort of a turn!"

"A turn, eh? What is that? What do you mean?"

"I happened to be looking at him at the moment he saw her—I was standing near their table, and I saw him give a start and turn rather strange looking, I thought."

"Yes. And then?"

"Then, sir, he actually stood up in his place at the table and stared across the room toward you, so that the people near-by were surprised, and stared at him some."

"That was funny, wasn't it? What happened then?"

"Mr. Carroll, sir, walked out from his own table a step or so until he could see you. I think he did so on purpose to get a look at you; and then he sort of sighed and returned to his seat."

"Go on, old chap. You are becoming very interesting. What next?"

"Well, sir, the four of them put their heads together, and seemed to be talking about you and the lady; and then they sent the note over here to you."

"Now, waiter, you look like a man of considerable sense. I'm going to try to see how much you have got."

"Thank you, sir."

"That dollar bill is—or soon will be—transformed into a five. Do you understand that, waiter?"

"Yes, sir."

"It may grow to even greater proportions than that. It all depends upon yourself."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to go back there and take my message. Do you remember what it was?"

"Perfectly."

"Very good. I wish you to listen particularly to everything that is said at that table, both at the time you deliver the message and after it; for if Mr. Carroll rises at once and crosses the room to me, I wish you to remain behind and listen to all that is said between the three that he leaves there. Can you do that?"

"I can try, sir."

"And remember all of it?"

"I think so, sir."

"You are still to remain there after Mr. Carroll returns to his table, and you are to manage to hear what is said then, when they ask him about it; and you are to linger near and listen just as long as it is possible to gather any information, and then you are to bring it all to me. Now go."

The waiter bowed and departed. He was intent upon earning that five dollars, and Nick was aware of it.

To Clarice the detective said, as soon as the waiter was gone:

"Now, Carmen, a word of warning to you."

"Yes."

"You see how fortunate it was that I questioned the waiter."

"Please go on. I don't quite follow you; but I am trying to do so."

"You heard him say that it was the discovery of your presence, didn't you, that was the first sign they had of our presence here?"

"Yes."

"And you know that the message was sent to me—as Santillos?"

"Yes."

"That proves that the man who calls himself Carroll has seen Carmen Glenn since you saw her this afternoon."

"Oh! Do you think so?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt of it. Now, I shall not attempt to introduce you to him when he comes. I might put my foot in it very badly if I did so, for the fact remains that I don't in the least know who he is. I shall not know him by sight until he speaks to me."

"It is a very dangerous game you are playing, Mr. Carter."

"Never mind that. What I wish to warn you about is this."

"Well?"

"When he appears, you are not to take any notice of him at all, more than by a mere inclination of the head; and that without a smile. Leave all the rest to chance and to the developments that will follow."

"Very good. I will do so."

"Has he started this way yet?"

"No. They are all talking together with the waiter."

"Probably they are trying to pump him in something the same fashion that I did it."

"Suppose he should betray you? Suppose he should tell them what you said to him, and all that you asked him to do?"

"It would be funny, wouldn't it?"

"It might be worse than funny."

"I don't think the waiter will do that. I think I won him. I believe that if they are trying on that sort of thing, he will tell me about it later on—and expect a bigger fee for doing it, too."

"The man whom he called Carroll is rising now," said Clarice.

"And the others—what are they doing?"

"They retain their seats."

"Good! Has Carroll started this way?"

"No. He has stopped to listen to something more that they are saying to him."

"Who seems to be doing the most of that say-so? The man, or the women?"

"The women, I think; one of them particularly."

"Do you know which one?"

"The one this way. The one the waiter said was Miss Travers. Now the man Carroll is coming this way, Mr. Carter."

"Tell me what he looks like. I mean what sort of a looking man is he?"

"He looks like a cowboy in dress clothes. You see, I even know something about cowboys."

"I begin to think that you are something of a mystery yourself, and a very charming one, too. Looks like a cowboy in a dress suit, eh? That sounds ominous. I wonder if Santillos has a whole Western outfit here with him."

"Be careful, Mr. Carter, he is here."

An instant later Nick felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and a heavy, but not unpleasant, voice said behind him, before he could obtain a view of the man himself:

"I thought you had pluck, Juan, and I reckon now that you've sure got it, and some, too. I would as soon uh thought uh seeing a bunch uh cattle in here as to run across you—*and* the lady. Good evening, miss. I hope you're quite well, ma'am."

And as the man spoke he swung himself around into a chair at the end of the table at which they were seated, making himself thoroughly at home.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER'S DARING VENTURE.

Let us stop here just a moment—long enough to realize the enormity of the predicament into which Nick Carter had plunged himself, and to appreciate the delicacy of the ground on which he would have to tread during that conversation that was to follow.

He was at the hotel, seated at a table in the public dining-room, in the character of a man who was evidently intimately known by the stranger who had just approached his table, while he himself did not even know the name of the stranger, save that a waiter had chanced to hear one uttered by others in addressing him casually.

But the name, Carroll, might easily be a surname or a given name; it might even be a name assumed for the occasion; but the detective gave himself the benefit of a metaphorical shrug, and resolved to see the thing through to the best of his ability, and to trust entirely to his own proverbial luck to guide him correctly.

He watched Clarice narrowly while the stranger was taking his seat, and saw, with satisfaction, that she was—outwardly, at least—not feased at all. She merely bestowed a casual nod upon the newcomer, in response to his salutation, and then turned her head away, or appeared to do so, as if not in the least interested in what was to follow.

The man was literally a big fellow—big-bodied, big-boned, big-muscled, big-featured, and big everything about him.

His hands were in the way; his feet were in the way; the tables and chairs in the dining-room seemed to be in his way, as if he were accustomed to magnificent distances—as, no doubt, he was; and there was the unmistakable softness of speech about him which belongs to Montana alone.

There was just one advantage that Nick Carter had in the interview that was to follow, which was that he thoroughly knew his character. If he did not at all know the party who had dropped so unceremoniously into the seat beside him, he did the man whom he himself was representing; he knew his mannerisms, his methods of speech, and, above all, he knew how to make use of that wolfish smile which was distinctly a Santillos asset, so far as conversation was concerned.

He made use of it now; and in a manner which might, if one chose to construe it in that way, have suggested that he was anything but pleased by the present encounter.

While he smiled he demanded, without making use of any name at all, or giving any salutation, more than a curt nod:

"Who have you got with you? I have not looked around. Who is with you?"

"Pardoe and his wife and Dot. But rats, Loco; what's the use uh bluffing? You know mighty well that you saw us when you came in. I say, Juan, I've got a few things that I would like to say to you," and he threw a significant glance in the direction of Clarice.

"Say on," said Nick coldly.

"What! Say it right out in meeting?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be blowed—and some! If I didn't know you so mighty well, I would think that you were looped sure enough. What's the game, anyhow, Juan?"

"What game?"

"Coming here the way you have—and bringing *her* with you?"

He had turned before Nick could reply, and added, addressing Clarice:

"I hope, ma'am, that you'll pardon me if some of the things I say strike you as being a leetle personal; but I'll tell you that I sure am plumb amazed to see you here. Things have happened to-day which I don't s'pose you know anything about, and which makes it seem a little bit strange that Juan should have brought you to this place to-night. I s'pose, ma'am, that there are lots of people who are in the habit of coming to this place who know you by sight, ain't there?"

Before she could reply, Nick interposed.

"If it's all the same to you," he said, "we will confine the conversation between ourselves." And again he permitted that wolfish smile to glisten across the corner of the table upon his unknown companion.

The man scowled, as if he did not at all relish the air of superiority that Nick adopted, and for an instant Nick thought that he was on the point of resenting it; but he replied coolly:

"I think, Juan, that, under the circumstances, I have got the right to ask why the devil you are here, anyhow—will ye?"

"Because I chose to come. That is all."

"Oh, I know well enough that you have won the reputation of doing locoed things; but you can bash me if this one don't sort uh take the department store for mine. What's the game, Juan?"

"What are *you* here for?" demanded Nick, ignoring the question. He preferred to ask questions rather than to answer them, although one course was just about as filled with danger as the other, so far as he was concerned.

"I expected that you'd ask that first off. The notion took us; that's all. We just happened to think of it, so we came. We're going from here direct to the station, you know."

"Oh, you are, eh? Do you think that is wise?"

"It's as wise as any other course. We're a dinner-party, ain't we? What are you going to do? Your coming here isn't carrying out what you said you were going to do."

"Circumstances have arisen which have altered my plans somewhat."

"Eh? Well—I see, you are going to take that train, aren't you?"

"I didn't say that *all* my plans were altered."

"But I say's like this play of yours, Juan."

Nick shrugged his shoulders exactly in the way that Juan Santillos would have done if he had actually been there; and he did it so perfectly that the man laughed, while he said, with distinct admiration in his tones:

"You're about the coolest devil I know, Juan. Now, what do you want me to do?"

"Precisely as I told you in the beginning."

"But what is the use of going to the house with the carriage at two o'clock if you are not going to be there? Why don't you turn the señorita over to our care here and now, instead of going through with all that rigmarole——"

"Don't you think you are rather exceeding your prerogatives?" interrupted Nick coldly.

"No, I don't. You told me to talk out in meeting, and I'm doing it. I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I've got to say a few things pretty blooming plain before Juan and I understand each other."

Clarice nodded, and he turned to Nick again.

"With all the things that have happened to-day," he said, speaking with deliberate meaning, and with a manner that showed that he had no fear whatever of the supposed Juan Santillos, "with a killing and an abduction in the air around us, and with it pretty generally known, or guessed—which is the same thing—by that Carter fellow that you are *it*, it seems to me, Juan, that you ought to resign the captaincy of this here outfit for the time being, and transfer your authority to somebody who has got a *few* brains left to use. If *you* want to go an' tie a slipt-knot to poke your own cabesa into, it doesn't follow that we all want to bunch our heads together inside of it; not by several dam sites—which isn't a swear word, miss, being only a figger of speech, meant to be somewhat emphatic and referring casually to a spot where they build sawmills."

He started to his feet then.

"I'm going back to the others," he said, with some heat in his voice.

Nick nodded his head in acquiescence.

"And we're going to light out uh this, instanter."

Nick nodded his head again—and smiled.

"Oh, you needn't show your teeth, Juan. I've seen 'em before, and I ain't in the least afraid uh your snarl, if some folks are. I'll keep up my end of the contract—you know me; but I may as well tell you here and now that if anything comes of this foolishness uh yours, I'll lay you out cold first off, and ask for an explanation afterward; *and that, mister man, is all that Bob Carroll has got to say for the present.*"

He swung on his heel before Nick could utter a word in reply, and strode away cross the room toward the table where his friends were seated.

"Watch him," said Nick to Clarice. "Tell me exactly what he does."

After a moment she spoke.

"He has gone directly to the table," she said. "Wait, Mr. Carter; don't move. He is returning."

In another moment Carroll was back again, and this time Nick half-turned in his chair, and, with easy familiarity, inquired:

"What is the matter now, Bob?"

"Huh! Coming around, are you?" was the reply. "I like you better, Juan, when you are as you were a moment ago. I'm not stuck on hearing my first name from your lips, for I have known men to turn up their toes after you'd been a little bit affectionate to 'em. But we'll drop all that. If you think I was too outspoken, you can forget it. I'll carry out all my part uh the game. You can bank on that. Have you got any money with you?"

"Money?" asked Nick, really taken somewhat aback by the question.

"Yes. Dot has got all uh mine, and she's put it where it ain't exactly handy to get at, in a crowd. Fifty'll do."

Without a word of remonstrance, Nick produced a roll of bills from his pocket, counted out fifty dollars, and gave it into Carroll's hand; and, without a word of thanks, the latter again turned on his heel and strode away.

"I wonder," said Nick musingly, "if that was a plant."

"A what?" asked Clarice.

"A plant; a trick. Never mind, if it was, it is now too late to alter it. Tell me what he and they are doing now?"

"They have risen from the table. They are preparing to leave the room. They are coming this way, too, so that they will pass this table. The woman he called Dot is in advance. She is looking at me as if she means to stop and talk to me. Oh, what shall I say?"

"Nothing. Answer questions, if they are easy to answer. Keep silent, if they are not. Where is that waiter? Can you see him?"

He saw her glance dart past the people who were crossing the room toward them, and change from place to place, until at last it stopped; then she started, and in an instant more she said to him quietly:

"Yes, I see him. He is standing facing me—the waiter, I mean."

"Yes."

"He is holding his fingers against his lips, and seems to mean the gesture for me. What can be his idea?"

"He means that he has overheard something which suggests to him that you had better remain silent when you are spoken to. Do that. Don't answer a question, no matter who addresses you, and do not permit yourself to look directly at any of them."

"Hush! Here they are."

A swishing of silken skirts announced the presence of a woman beside Nick Carter's chair. A faint odor of violet came to him; and then a voice that was strangely soft and musical, as if its owner might have been a great singer, had she chosen, spoke to him in Spanish.

"This is quite an unexpected surprise, *amigo mio*," she said, tapping lightly with her fan upon Nick Carter's shoulder; and the detective turned in his chair and looked up into her face, beholding a woman of extraordinary beauty; a woman with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks, faultless complexion and matchless figure, who was gazing down upon him with an intensity which thrilled him—and which also frightened him, if fright can be said to be the proper word to apply to the start which that look gave him.

The detective saw, in that one glance, that this beautiful creature was in love with the man whom he was at that moment impersonating; and he saw also that she was intensely jealous of his companion—of Clarice—who, without doubt, she believed to be Carmen Glenn. And he knew that eyes of love would penetrate disgui which might defy all else but that.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FELLOW WHO LOOKS LIKE ME.

Nick shrugged his shoulders; then he smiled; then he returned the look she gave him, with cent per cent interest, and he murmured something which sounded like, *"Querida mia,"* which is Spanish for "my darling"; and he saw that the flush on her cheeks deepened and that the sparkle in her eyes intensified—and she laughed lightly as she turned away and addressed her next remark to Clarice, still speaking in Spanish.

"You are daring, *amiga mia*," she said. "Let me congratulate you upon being the best actress, in your line, that I ever saw. One would have supposed that your sorrow and terror of this afternoon were real; but now——"

She paused, and Clarice, after flashing one glance upon her, deliberately turned her eyes toward a distant part of the room.

In the meantime, the others of the party had passed on, and were waiting in the doorway for "Dot," or "Miss Travers," or whatever her name might be, to join them.

Perceiving that Clarice would give her no answer, the beautiful woman turned again to Nick, and, with ill-concealed passion in her voice, she said:

"I suppose, *Juanito mio*, that you have a satisfactory explanation for all that has happened to-night; no? I shall expect one. And as for this——"

"You had better go," said Nick, interrupting her. "There will be time enough for explanations—all around—later on."

He made the remark with an evident undercurrent of meaning, so that the woman seemed to understand that there was a menace in it, for the flush died out of her cheeks, and she said rapidly, in Spanish:

"It was not my fault—our coming here. Perhaps it was not entirely of your own desire that *you* came here,

either. I will tell you about it, and you shall tell me—after two."

And then she glided away from them and out through the door into the corridor of the hotel.

Nick breathed a sigh of genuine relief.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of that?"

"I think," replied Clarice, "that the lady who is called Dot is madly in love with my vis-à-vis; or, rather, with the gentleman for whom she mistook him."

"By Jove! Clarice, but you have sharp eyes!"

"Carmen, if you please, sir. As Clarice I should not be here with you; as Carmen, I am very much at home, and very well satisfied to be dining with you. Here is your waiter."

The assistant to the head waiter approached them at that instant.

"Well," said the detective, "have you come for that five dollars?"

"If you please, sir."

"Have you earned it?"

"I have tried."

"Let me hear what you have to say; and be quick about it, too."

"If I speak plainly, sir——"

"That is precisely what I desire you to do."

"Very well, sir. In that case, you will not take offense?"

"No."

"The lady who stopped here at your table for a moment—she is very angry. I think she is jealous of madam here."

"Without doubt."

"I heard her say that she believed your presence here with this lady was some trick that you were disposed to play upon them all; she said she would ask some questions which would puzzle this lady to answer. That is why I put my fingers to my lips so that madam would understand that she was to say as little as possible."

"Go on."

"There was great surprise expressed among them that this lady was here at all; that she dared to come here with you, sir; that she should consent to come here at all, even if she had the courage; and that you dared yourself to bring her here."

"Go on."

"They expressed wonder among themselves because this lady sat so quietly at the table with you, and seemed to converse with you in a friendly way. They wondered what you had done to her to force her to do so. They wondered why she did not leap from the table and attempt to escape from you; why she did not call for assistance; and I heard the expression: 'If she knew what has happened at her own home since she left it, she would not sit so still;' and, 'It is a wonder that some one of the people who frequent this place doesn't tell her.' And after that there was talk about a train that leaves the Grand Central Station at half-past two in the morning—this coming morning, I think. That is about all that I could hear, sir."

"You have done well. Here is your five-spot. Now, when the gentleman who came here to talk with me returned to them, what did *he* say?"

"He called you names, sir. Said you were a fool, and all that sort of thing; said he believed this lady was doped, or hypnotized, or 'plumb locoed'; I think those are the words; and he also said that if he did not know differently, by the evidence of his own eyes, he would never believe that you were Juan Santillos."

"Good. Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

"Can you find an excuse to step outside the dining-room for a moment?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Go and find out where they have gone to. I wish to know if they are waiting anywhere about."

"Yes, sir."

"Wait one moment before you go. I may not have an opportunity to ask you more questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Was there, during any of the conversation you have heard between the parties at the other table at any time to-night, any mention made of any person who was not here to-night?"

"There was once a mention of a detective, sir, although there was no name mentioned."

"What was said about the detective?"

"I heard only one remark about it. These are the words: 'If that fresh detective was only the other fellow, we wouldn't have the slightest cause for uneasiness.' It was the lady who stopped for a moment at this table who said it."

"Thank you. That will do. Now go and find out what has become of them."

When he was gone, Clarice asked:

"What was meant by that reference to a detective, Mr. Carter?"

"I am afraid that it meant that they have somehow captured Chick. I sent him out this afternoon in pursuit of Santillos. He has not returned, and I have not heard from him. I am positive now that he has not been led out of town on a hot trail; and therefore there is but one reason to which to attribute his silence and absence."

"And that is that he has fallen into their power?"

"Yes."

"May I ask a question, Mr. Carter?"

"Anything you please."

"What do you suppose would happen if those people should encounter the real man—the man whom you are impersonating—somewhere out there in the corridor?"

"There might be complications," said Nick. "But I hardly think it is likely."

"Why not? They seemed surprised to see you—him—here; and yet they also seemed to regard it as quite characteristic of the man. If that is so, he might really come here."

"I don't think he would be quite so foolhardy as that."

"Another question. I don't wish to seem impertinent, but——"

"You are not at all. Ask what you wish."

"Why do you permit them to escape? Why do you not attempt to follow them, to see where they go? It cannot be a very long time from now until they will meet the real character for whom they have mistaken you, and it seems to me that you will be in danger after that happens."

The detective smiled.

"I could have made nothing by following them at once," he said. "Besides, I already know that it is their intention to go to the Grand Central Station at two, or a little after. But, as a matter of fact, I took still better precautions than that."

"Will you tell me what they were?"

"Certainly. Do you remember that while we were strolling through the corridors, before we entered the dining-room, I stopped you for a moment, while I talked rather earnestly and in an undertone with a man we met?"

"Yes."

"That man is the chief of the house detective force. I know him very well indeed. We often do favors for each other. I had only to speak to him to be recognized instantly."

"I understand. Well?"

"What I said to him when we stopped beside him was this: 'I am Nick Carter. I am going with this lady into the dining-room. If you should see me engage in conversation with anybody who stops for a moment at my table, or if I should pass to another table, to converse with any person, will you have one of your best men, or two of them, if necessary, keep tabs on that person, or persons, for me, so that I will not have to leave the room?' He said he would do so."

"That was very thoughtful on your part."

"When Carroll was seated here at the table with us," continued Nick, "one of the house detectives strolled through the room and took a good look at him; again, while the young woman lingered here, in passing out, he appeared at the doorway for an instant. Wait, now. There comes the waiter back again, and he looks as if he had some important news. I would be willing to bet a hundred to one that the waiter believes this to be some sort of an interview. Well, my man, what is it? I see you have something on your mind."

"Indeed, I have, sir. I—I have guessed now what it is all about."

"You are not paid for guessing——"

"Please forgive me, sir; but I was so puzzled. Waiters have curiosity, you know, sir. Your brother—madam's husband—is out there, sir."

"My brother! Madam's hus——— Oh! I see!"

"You understand, sir, now that I have guessed? They are telling him about it; that you are here, that madam is here; that there is a train to take; that——"

"Shut up! Do you mean that there is a man out there, somewhere in the corridors of the hotel, who looks like me?"

"Your very image, sir."

Nick grinned, and Clarice smiled. She saw the humor of the situation, too; and she understood the "guess" that the waiter had made.

"Where are they?" asked Nick.

"In the Persian room, sir."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"What were they doing when you left them?"

"Talking together very excitedly, sir. Your brother appears to be the coolest one in the lot, sir—unless I should mention Mr. Carroll, sir."

"Exactly; Mr. Carroll. He is evidently to be reckoned with, and he will not be an easy customer to handle. In the Persian room, eh? That will do, waiter. You have earned your money. I may want you again some time."

The detective turned, then, to his companion.

"Come, Clarice," he said, rising. "We will go to the Persian room."

"To face them all, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes—if they are still there. And, Clarice, you will need every whit of your courage and presence of mind now. Come."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER PLAYS A STRONG HAND.

They hastened along the corridor toward the room in question, for the detective was determined now not to mince matters at all. If he could but get there before the real Santillos withdrew and made good his escape, Nick intended to place the man under arrest at once, no matter who or how many stood in the way of its achievement.

But when they entered the room quickly, Santillos was not there.

He had, in the interim, made his escape; and the others of his party were just in the act of leaving the room, wheeled once more in the direction of the dining-room.

For an instant they were thrown into some appearance of consternation at the sudden appearance of Nick Carter and Clarice; but to see them again was evidently a part

of their hastily made plans; for, on the instant they met, the woman who had stopped at Nick's table, and who had flashed her eyes so magnificently upon him, hastened forward and seemed almost to throw herself into the detective's arms.

"We were just going in search of you," she exclaimed in English.

"Indeed," replied Nick; and he understood now what the game was to be. They were to appear to accept him without question for what he represented himself to be; they were not to let it appear that they had encountered the real Santillos; and they were to lead him into some trap which Don Juan had already gone to prepare.

But forewarned is forearmed.

Nick was, under the circumstances, quite willing to be led, for he realized now that no time could be lost in the rescue of Carmen Glenn.

"Yes," continued the woman. "We came in here to talk it over between us. It seemed so very strange, after all that has happened to-day, to see you and Miss—and your companion—in the dining-room that for the time we were quite flustered."

"I can well understand that," said Nick.

"Do you think it necessary, Juan, that we should separate again? Can we not remain together now?"

"Why, certainly."

"And don't you think," said Carroll, stepping quickly forward and interposing his huge body almost between the woman and Nick, as if he thought she might say altogether too much, "that we had better light out uh this mighty sudden? To my mind, it ain't safe here. There is too much at stake."

Nick shrugged his shoulders exactly as Santillos would have done it had he been there.

"I am quite contented to remain where I am—until it is time to go to the train," he said easily. "They permit smoking in this room, do they not?"

He lighted a cigar without waiting for a reply; and the remaining woman of the party—the one who had taken no part in the proceeding thus far—stepped forward and said:

"Since when have you abandoned cigarettes, Señor Santillos?"

"I have never abandoned them, since I rarely, if ever, smoke them," replied Nick coolly, for he remembered perfectly well that Santillos, although a Spaniard, rarely used a cigarette.

Then, with one quick glance of warning toward Clarice, he approached the woman who was called Dot, and, drawing her a little to one side, he said, so that the others could hear, but as if he intended that they should not:

"I wish to talk with you a moment. Will you stroll with me in the corridor?"

She stepped to his side instantly, with that same bright smile on her face, for it was evident that at least she could not forget that this man looked like the man she loved, and together they passed through the door, leaving Clarice alone in the Persian room with three people who were for the moment, at least, her deadly enemies.

Nick, who wished for a few moments yet to carry on the part he was playing, bent toward his companion as they walked side by side, and he said to her:

"You should not look at me in public as you do, *cara mia*."

"No?" she laughed. "Why not, pray?"

"Your expression—the expression of your adorable eyes, is a revelation, *querida*."

"You are disposed to be affectionate to-night, Juan. Pray, what do my eyes reveal so plainly?"

"An exquisite thing called love, my dear."

"Ah! Even you can see it at last."

She turned her beautiful face toward him and laughed lightly. Then, with a meaning that was not wholly plain, she added:

"You are exquisite yourself to-night, Juan."

"Yes?" he replied. "I am glad that you think so. Do you see that gentleman yonder? The one whom we are approaching, and who is looking toward us?"

"Yes," she replied. "What about him?"

"He is a friend of mine whom you have not met. I wish to present you to him. May I?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"No," she said. "I had rather not."

"But it is too late now. See, he has already seen my signal, and is coming this way. Really, I wish you would make the best of it."

She would have darted away from his side then, but he seized her gently, although firmly, by the arm and held her; and then the man to whom Nick had drawn her attention, and who was in reality the chief of the house detectives, stopped directly in front of them, for he had seen Nick's signal and understood it.

"Bob," said Nick, "I want to present you to Miss Travers. Miss Travers, Mr. Updyke—a very good friend. Bob, I want a word with you; Miss Travers may hear it. Shall we step into that alcove yonder?"

Still retaining the hold upon the woman's arm, Nick drew her toward the alcove, and they passed beyond the portières, thus being concealed for a moment from the view of others who might be traversing the corridors of the hotel.

And then, with deliberation, Nick said:

"Bob, will you take the lady's other arm? Thank you." And to her he added: "Don't be alarmed at what I am about to say, *cara mia;* however, if you will listen carefully, you will be interested."

"But I do not care to hear it, Juan," she protested.

"Allow me to insist that you do hear it, please. Bob"—his voice changed to sternness—"there was a cold-blooded murder committed this afternon, in a house that

is not far from this hotel—— What is the matter, Dot? Stand your ground. And this lady whom we each hold by an arm is an accessory after the fact. I am going to leave her in your care for the present, and ask you to confine her in that convenient strong room of yours until I can tell you what to do with her."

The woman tried to start away from them, but the two men held her tightly. Then she endeavored to scream; but Nick quietly placed one hand over her mouth, while he whispered in her ear:

"If you are sensible, it is possible that *you* may escape the consequences of what you have done, and what you are trying to do. If you raise a row, you shall go to the station-house and to a cell, instead of to a comfortable room."

She shivered, but attempted no reply; and Nick saw that she would not again attempt to cry out.

"There was also an abduction, Bob," he continued in the same tone he had used before. "Miss Carmen Glenn was stolen away from her maid, while at a department store in the city, and she is at the present moment somewhere near here, a prisoner. This woman here between us is also an accessory to that fact; I think before as well as after it.

"Now, madam"—he turned sternly to her again—"will you go quietly with this gentleman to a room where he will make you comfortable until I need you, or shall I have recourse to these?"

He drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and held them before her eyes.

She shuddered.

"No, no, no! Not that!" she breathed, in terror.

"What, then? Will you go quietly?"

"Yes."

"There is an elevator directly around this corner. Mr. Updyke will conduct you by that way. But now—before you go there is a question which you will do well to answer."

"A question?" she replied. "I thought you knew everything. You are not a detective, are you?"

"Yes; but I do not know everything. You will do well to reply truthfully to the question I shall ask you—if you wish to escape the consequences of that part you played in the murder of Richard Glenn."

"I played no part whatever in that. You know I did not."

"Unfortunately, I do not know any such thing."

"It is the last word I ever utter, Nick Carter," she said coldly, turning her eyes to his and speaking with [illegible] decision, "I did not know until you told it just [illegible] that a murder had been committed. I knew that Richard Glenn was about [illegible] to die in his chair; but I [illegible] that [illegible] by the sudden appearance of Juan Santillos in his presence, and the shock of threats that Santillos made to him."

"I believe you," replied Nick quietly.

"Thank you. It is the truth."

"I will tell you, then, for your present information, that Santillos stood in the doorway of the old gentleman's room, and from there threw a knife so that it pierced Richard Glenn's heart."

"I did not know it."

"I have said that I believe you. I do."

"I thank you again."

"And now, if you would save yourself many unpleasant consequences, will you answer the question I will ask you?"

"What is the question?"

"Where has Santillos concealed Carmen Glenn? Where is she at this moment?"

Dolores Traverso—that was her true name—started and turned a face filled with surprise upon the detective.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "Are you crazy?"

"I mean what I say. Where is she?"

"She is where you left her—back there in the Persian room with the others."

"I understand you now," said Nick, and he smiled broadly. "But you are mistaken, signorita. That young woman is not Carmen Glenn. She is, like myself, an impersonation. You knew that, did you not?"

"No. None of us know it."

"Don't try to deceive me, señorita. It is not yet fifteen minutes since Santillos himself was with you all in that room. He must have told you of the deception."

"But he did not. He did not know that there was a deception. He knew who you were, for once before he said you had disguised yourself to look like him; but he thought that in some manner you had rescued Carmen, and that you had brought her here with you. He has gone now——" She stopped.

"Yes?" said Nick. "He has gone now—for what?"

"To find out how you did it. To meet us at the place where we were to take you. To prepare to make you a prisoner, and to again secure possession of—— *Oh! what am I saying?*"

"You are saying exactly the things you should say. You are telling me——"

"I am betraying my friends. I am betraying him! And I will not do that—*no! not to save my soul from eternal torment!*"

CHAPTER X.

PLAYING WITH A WOMAN'S LOVE.

She was very beautiful as she stood there with her hands clasped together, facing the detective, and Robert Updyke was visibly affected by it.

"The lady who is here at the hotel with me is not Carmen Glenn," said Nick again. "She is one whom I have persuaded to help me, and whom I made up to represent Carmen, as I made myself in the guise of Santillos. Now tell me— "

"I will tell you nothing—nothing more than I have already done."

"Where is Carmen Glenn hidden away, señorita?"

She did not answer. Nick tried another tack.

"Pardon me for mentioning it," he said. "You and I were joking about it just now, but you have some considerable affection for Juan Santillos. Do not reply to me now; I do not mean to offend you. I am merely telling you a plain truth. It is this: Juan Santillos loves his cousin, Carmen Glenn. He has loved her since they were children. He——"

"You lie! You lie!"

"I do not lie. I tell you the truth. He loves Carmen —not you."

"It is a lie! A lie! A lie!"

"It is not a lie. It is the truth. Now, listen. Will you permit him to carry that girl away into captivity when you know that the act will be your own undoing?"

"You are deceiving me. It is not true."

"I am not deceiving you. It is true. You yourself have already more than half-guessed it to be the truth. I saw as much in your eyes to-night when you believed that I was Santillos, and that it was Carmen at the table with me. Will you let him carry her off in order that he may make her his wife, when——"

Isabel Traverso was Mexican-Spanish. Her temper was like the flash of power to which a spark is applied. Instantly she burst into a perfect fury.

"No!" she cried out. "Ten thousand times no! It shall not be so. He shall regret the day that he dared to deceive me. He shall——" Again she stopped. The information was gone. "But I would sooner believe him than you," she said very quickly.

"Listen," said Nick. "Do you know the history of Carmen Glenn?"

"No; and I do not care to hear it."

"Nevertheless, I will tell you a part of it."

"I do not wish to hear it."

"You do wish to hear it. You are listening with all your ears at this moment, and your eyes are shining with a jealous rage that would be her death—or his—if they were here before you at this moment. Do not think that I am playing with your love for that man who is not worthy of it, or of any woman. I am striving for justice at your hands. Carmen Glenn has no love for Juan Santillos. She hates him, despises him, abhors him. She is at this moment in his power, and you can free her from it by telling me where to find her.

"It is not the first time she has been in his power.

"Years ago, when they were both children, he loved her. He stole her away from her home then. He took her to Europe. He put her in a convent, and until she was twenty years old he kept her there. He has loved her all his life—all her life. He has tried again and again to make her his wife. He had resorted to force to do so once, when I rescued her. Since he has been here in New York this time he has renewed his protestations of love to her. He has written her letters, beseeching her to fly to him; asking her to meet him at this hotel, so that he might at least have an opportunity to press his suit—and I have no doubt that he wrote those letters almost at your elbow, all the while protesting his love for you."

"Prove it! Prove it!" she cried. "The letters! The letters! Where are they?"

"Here," replied Nick, producing them. "I have them here with me. Look!"

He took the small packet from his pocket and held it before her; but instantly her hand shot out, and she seized upon them.

She almost tore one of them open. She held it to the light. She began to read, and then, without a sound, she suddenly collapsed upon the floor at their feet, senseless, inanimate, still.

"Curse that fellow!" said Updyke. "I would like to choke him."

"There is something better for you to do, Bob," said the detective. "Call somebody to assist you, and take her to your strong room. Then, if you can, get from her the information I want. Find out where they have hidden Carmen Glenn."

"And you, Nick?"

"I must return to the Persian room, where I left the

others. Already I have been absent longer than is wise. They may be getting nervous; but still, I think they would wait, since I had this girl with me. And she is only a girl, isn't she?"

"A very beautiful one."

"Yes. Will you look out for her?"

"Sure."

"And wait up for me, all night, if necessary? I will wish to see you later."

"Yes."

"Then I leave her in your charge; but on your life do not let her escape. It may turn out that she will be extremely useful to us."

"One thing, Nick, before you go, I would like to say."

"What is that, Bob?"

"I think it was kind of low down, don't you, to play on her love for that scoundrel as you did?"

"I admit, Bob, that it would be so under ordinary circumstances; but when you consider two things, I think I did eminently right."

"What are they?"

"First, the man is such a scoundrel that he is not worthy of the love of any woman; and, second, I happened to know what I was talking about. The fellow has no love for her, because he is madly—crazily—in love with Carmen Glenn; and therefore he is fooling this woman."

The detective turned suddenly then, and, without another word, left the alcove and hastened toward the Persian room, where he had left the man Carroll with his two friends—and Clarice, in a measure, at their mercy.

It did not occur to him until now that they might have grown impatient of waiting; that Santillos might have been lurking near all the time, and that his absence might have been taken advantage of to further the schemes of the outlaw.

But now he hastened forward with all speed, and entered the room—entered it to stop and stare; for the room was bare of people. There was not a soul there, not even one of the maids of the hotel.

He turned and dashed into the corridor again; but there was nobody around whom he could question.

The night was so far advanced that the place was almost deserted. It was evident to Nick at once that Carroll and his friends had taken their departure, and that in some way they had managed to take Clarice with them.

And then he laughed, almost aloud.

"Of course," he said to himself, "I should understand the situation better than I do, after what the señorita said to me. They knew that I was an impostor, but they believed that Clarice was the real thing; they believed that she was really Carmen Glenn; and, therefore, the instant that I left her alone with them, they saw an opportunity to get her back again into their power, believing that I had somehow freed her from their clutches."

He crossed the hall to the entrance from the street, and passing outside, stood there a moment leaning against the building.

There was one man there on duty, and Nick called him to him, and asked him if he had seen the party pass out; but the reply was in the negative. No much party had been seen.

But there were other exits from the hotel, and Nick was about to hasten to them one after another, when he remembered that the señorita might be disposed to be of service now, if she had recovered consciousness; and he hurried to the alcove where he had left her in the care of Bob Updyke.

They were there still; Dolores was just coming around; she opened her eyes just at the moment that Nick made his appearance.

"Come," he said somewhat sternly to Updyke. "Help me—or, rather, I will help you, to take her to that room."

But she was able to walk now, with their assistance, and they hurried her to the elevator and into it, and so to the tenth floor where the strong room was located.

It is not generally known that modern first-class hotels have regular prison cells, and padded cells as well, in their make-up; but they do; and it was to one of these former, really a large and comfortable room provided for women, that they conducted Dolores.

When they had shown her inside it, and she had looked about her in some amazement, Nick said to her:

"You will remain here through the remainder of the night, and you will receive every attention, the same as if you were a guest; what will happen to you after that, depends upon yourself. Your friends in the Persian room deserted you and left you to your fate, whatever that might prove to be. Is there any reason why you should be so particularly loyal to them?"

"To them? No. I do not care for them—that!" and she snapped her fingers contemptuously.

"Then tell me at once where you think they have gone? They have taken Clarice with them."

"Clarice? Who is Clarice?"

"She is the young lady who was playing the part of Carmen Glenn."

"Ha! So you have lost your sweetheart as well as I, mine!" exclaimed Dolores, with a bitter laugh.

"Clarice is not my sweetheart. She is in reality Carmen Glenn's maid. Where have they taken her? Do you know? Have you an idea?"

"Yes. They would go to find Juan, where he was to await us all."

"Where is that? Tell me."

"Will you let me go free if I will tell you?"

"No; not until morning at least."

"Then I will not tell you. Go and find them for yourself."

"I will promise to let you go free in the morning—after I have captured the others, and rescued Carmen."

"Nick. Let me go now, or I will not tell you."

"It is impossible. You would manage in some manner to warn them of——"

"Bah! You are afraid of your own shadow. I will promise not to warn them. I always keep my promises, Nick Carter."

"To do I. Tell me what I wish to know, and I will give orders now to set you at liberty at ten o'clock in the morning."

"Nick. Let me go now or I will not tell you," she repeated.

Nick was silent, and she spoke again.

"Listen," she said. "If I do not tell you they will escape, and they will take Carmen with them; and they will also take Clarice, whom you have left in their power; and believe me, you have very little time to do all that you want to do."

"I know," said Nick. "The train leaves at half-past two."

"The train! Bah! There is no train. That is not their method of escape. Do you think that we would leave as openly as that? Don't be silly."

"Tell me then. Tell me."

"And you will let me go free? Now? At once?"

"You shall leave here free in one hour if you will tell me what I wish to know. Mr. Updyke shall set you at liberty after one hour from now. That is the best I will do."

"Very well, Nick Carter. I will tell you," she said finally.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOUSE WITH THE LIGHTED WINDOWS.

"I shall make a condition, even yet," she said, stepping a little nearer to him.

"What is that?" said Nick. "I have made about all the conditions I will agree to."

"It is that I be not shadowed, nor followed when I am set at liberty."

"It is granted. I have no idea of having you followed."

She laughed somewhat bitterly; then she said:

"Do you know the house that stands directly behind that where Carmen Glenn lives when she is at home? The house that fronts on the next street below it? The house that has been vacant for a long time? Do you know that house?"

"Yes. It belongs to—it belonged to Mr. Glenn."

"I know it. It is there that you will find them—if you are quick."

"Is that the truth, señorita?"

"It is the truth as far as I know it. That is where Carmen was taken; so far as I know, she is there still. We are all to meet at that house at two o'clock—it must be almost as late as that now."

"It is one—very nearly."

"We were to meet there at two. At half-past two, carriages were to come there for us and we were to be taken away."

"Where? In case they have gone when I get there."

"I do not know. It was a secret which Juan kept severely to himself."

"But there was mention of a train from the Grand Central Station at half-past two."

"That was a blind. The waiter was listening. While I did not suspect him, I did not wish him to know too much. I see now that he *was* listening—for you."

"Yes."

"I have told you all I know. That is the house. The number of it is seventeen. Now, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes?"

"In an hour from now I may leave?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Updyke, do you understand that, and will you comply with it?"

"Yes," replied Updyke.

She turned again to Nick and took a step nearer to him. Then she paused and smiled.

"I should advise that you survey that disguise, or,

at least, the facial part of it before you go," she said. "They will recognize you all too quickly unless you do—if you should happen to overtake them."

"You are right," he replied; and he stepped across the room to the mirror.

Three minutes later he turned and faced her again, and, although he still wore the same costume, his face was the face of Nick Carter, as it should be.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I wished to know you as you are." And then with meaning, she added: "I shall not soon forget you."

Nick turned toward the door, and she called to him. Then she advanced until she was quite close to him and reached out her right hand.

"It can do you no harm to take my hand in parting," she said. "I had nothing to do with the murder. I did not know it had been committed. Will you do it?"

"Yes," said Nick; and he took her hand.

"Thank you again," she said. "Good-by. It is probably the last time we will meet—in friendship at least. Good-by."

"Good-by," he replied, and left her; and Updyke followed him from the room.

"Do you wish me to accompany you, Nick?" he asked. "I can do it as well as not, and you may need some help."

"Yes," said the detective. "Come along. But first, leave word with somebody to set her at liberty at the end of the hour. I would not even appear to break my word with her. But, stop a moment," he added. "I have an idea. Give me that key."

The hotel detective handed the key to him and Nick unlocked the door again.

For a moment he stood on the threshold, but then he advanced a step and placed the key on the table inside the room.

"Señorita," he said, "there is the key to this door. It might not be possible for us to be here on time, as Updyke goes with me. You may lock yourself in the room and remain your own prisoner for the required hour. After that, set yourself at liberty. You see, I take your word. Good-by."

Then he went out again, closing the door after him; and he waited a moment until he heard the key grate in the lock.

"What have you done?" asked Updyke.

"I have left the key with her. She will stay the hour; and even if she does not, it can make no difference now. She can do nothing to interfere with us. Come."

"You are a strange chap, Nick," said the house detective. "You certainly have original methods about some things."

"Yes. One of my original methods is always keeping my word with a criminal. They find it out quite as soon as bankers and other people—and it makes them quite as apt to keep their promises to me."

They hurried to the ground floor. They found a belated hansom at the door, for Nick had not detained his automobile at the hotel when it took Clarice and him there, earlier in the night.

To the driver Nick gave the address, and they were whirled away as fast as the horse could well travel.

The house, when they approached it, was alight from top to bottom. Every window was illumined, and Nick stared at it in wonder.

"That is mighty strange," he muttered.

"What is strange?" asked Updyke.

"That they should have lighted up the house like that. Man, the house has been vacant for months—almost a year, in fact. It belonged to Glenn. He was an eccentric, you know. For some reason he did not let it lately, although it is fully furnished from top to bottom."

"But he seems to have let it now—or his agents have done so."

They were out of the hansom by this time, and Nick ascended the steps at a couple of leaps; but when he had placed his hand upon the button to press it, he stopped.

He waited until the hansom with its rubber tires and rubber-shod horse had disappeared noiselessly up the street, and then, disdaining the bell, he drew his picklock from his pocket and attacked the door.

In a moment he had it open—as far as the chain upon it at the opposite side would let it go; but he quickly snapped that also with a pair of small nippers, and then he stepped inside, followed by Updyke.

They found themselves in the midst of a brilliant illumination, for it seemed that every light in the house had been turned on.

But other than that one fact there was nothing.

They listened, but not a sound came to them from the interior of the house, and instantly Nick had the feeling come over him that they had arrived too late; that their birds had flown.

"Stay here and guard the exit," he said to Updyke; and then he sped forward up the stairs to the second floor; thence onward through the rooms, one by one; thence up the second flight and into more rooms, and so on to the top of the house.

Everywhere there was evidence of recent occupancy, but nowhere was there a human being present, either dead or alive; and he descended again to the ground floor and to the door where he had left the detective from the hotel.

"They have gone," he said. "Wait here yet a moment longer."

He ran down the stairs to the basement; he went through it from end to end; he descended to the cellar —or started to do so when he halted in dismay, for directly below him at the foot of the stairs a small fire was burning on the cellar floor.

In an instant he saw what it was—what it meant; and he leaped down the stairs at a single bound, and in another instant had scattered the fire right and left. In five minutes more it would have reached the stairs of wood—and there, bound firmly to the stairway so that there was no possibility of escape, was Chick.

Bound, gagged, and helpless he was; and he had been arranged in such a position that he must surely have been burned to death if rescue had not arrived just at the moment it did.

It required only a moment to cut him loose, and then to entirely eliminate all signs of a fire; and then the assistant rather weakly followed his chief to the basement floor.

"Nice pickle!" was Nick's comment. "Are you able to keep on your legs, Chick?"

"Yes. Just about. Not much more. I have lost a good deal of blood, I expect."

For the first time, then, Nick saw that Chick was busily engaged in winding his handkerchief, which he had twisted into a rope, tightly around his leg above the ankle; and that blood had been flowing freely from that ankle.

"Great Scott, Chick, what is it?" he demanded, then, leading his assistance to stop the flow of blood from the wound.

"I suppose that that devil of a Santillos thought that if the fire didn't burn me, I would soon bleed to death," was the slow and somewhat weak reply.

"Do you mean to say that he deliberately did that, Chick?"

"Sure. He came back alone after the others had left me, and he laughed in my face. Then he told me that they had been altogether too easy with me, and without a word of what he intended to do, he drew the edge of a sharp knife across my ankle, and then stood watching me, with that wolfish smile on his face, until he saw the blood flowing. Then, with another laugh, he went away. But Nick, don't mind me. I'll be all right. You have no time to lose."

"Why not? Do you know where they have gone?"

"Yes. Santillos must have money to burn."

"He has. What have you to tell? Be quick."

"He has hired a special—an engine and a Pullman—on the Erie. He has engaged engines all the way through. The car is side-tracked over at Pavonia, in Jersey. It is to start the moment they arrive, and they are bound for Mexico."

"Who is with him? Quick."

"Two men—one named Carroll——"

"Never mind the names. Two men, one woman, and Carmen——"

"And two Carmens, Nick. Who in the world is that other one?"

"Never mind now. Is that all?"

"Yes. I don't know how they left here; but I do know that a tug was to take them from the foot of Thirtieth Street to Pavonia. The tug has been waiting since midnight, so I heard them say."

"And how long have they been gone from here, Chick?"

"I don't know. I couldn't tell much about time. It seemed to be about a year to me, but I suppose it is about half an hour. No more than that."

"Wait here where you are, Chick. I will send somebody to you at once."

Nick turned and bounded up the stairs.

"Chick is down there. He needs you," he said to Updyke, as he ran past him. "Take care of him. I will have to do the rest of this business alone."

He was out of the house and gone before Updyke could reply.

At the corner of Fifth Avenue, he came upon a belated cab that was returning to the stable, and with a bound he was upon the step.

"Run your horse to the foot of Thirtieth Street, west side, and I'll give you ten dollars," he called out to the astonished driver. "Run!"

And the horse did run. He was a good one, too, and he ran well; but, all the same, he could not go fast enough to overtake those who had half an hour start of them.

CHAPTER XII.

"BILL," OF THE MOTOR-BOAT.

Thirtieth Street and the North River, as all New Yorkers know, is the old Hudson River R. R. Station.

There are still facilities there for the landing of tugs, barges, and all sorts of river craft at the piers; and it still is and probably will ever be a resort for river tugs.

The detective did not entertain much hope that he could overtake the fleeing party before they embarked upon the tug that had been hired to be in readiness to transport them over the river to Pavonia, which is a considerable distance below that point on the opposite side.

But what he did hope to find was another tug there, with fire up and steam in its boiler, which he could hire to take him over.

There was just a possible chance that he would find such a one; a remote possible chance, and that was all.

But it was a chance that he was obliged to take, because he knew that it was utterly useless to attempt to utilize the ferry at that hour of the night. Ferry-boats would be operating only at irregular intervals, at best, and the probability was that it would be an hour or two before he could get across in that manner.

And such a delay as that would be fatal.

The special train would already have started for the west, and although he might succeed in heading it off by telegraph, there was doubt that he would find the fugitives, even if he did so, for now that they knew their plans had been in part discovered and that they were likely to be pursued they would resort to every possible expedient to make good their escape into Pavonia, possibly abandoning their special by stealth on the way.

But, if he could find such a tug——

Even so, there was a possibility that he might still be too late. The special might have started; and yet Nick knew that specials are not to be very uncertain things, particularly in starting on their journeys.

The railroad-men have business to attend to; there are a hundred and one small details which have to be attended to before it is safe to let them loose on a trunk-line track.

There is always apt to be delay in the yard, as the track section of a railway-station is called among the initiated.

"The tug! The tug! The tug!" was Nick's constant thought while the horse was running at full speed through the street toward the river. "If only there is another tug there!"

He looked at his watch as he leaped from the cab to the ground and pressed a ten-dollar bill into the driver's hand. It was exactly two o'clock.

"Wait ten minutes," he called to the driver. "If I am not here by that time, you may go away without me."

Then he dashed away toward the river, and out upon one of the piers.

He remembered again that talk he had heard about the hour of half-past two.

He figured as he thought about it that the special had been engaged to start at that time, and that in all probability the track would be in readiness so that there would be no delay in making the start, and he prayed as he ran out upon the pier, that there might be a tug——

He almost stopped as he ran, for at that instant he heard something ahead of him, on the water near the end of the pier, that gave him sudden hope.

In an instant he was running forward again, and, just as he reached the end of the pier, he saw the shadowy shape near him of a motor-boat.

It was passing the end of the pier, a hundred feet out in the stream, and with sudden energy he shouted to the man, or men, who were aboard of it.

"For God's sake stop!" he called. "Stop and come here! It is a matter of life and death, my friends!"

They heard him. The engine was shut off. A voice called to him.

"What is the matter?" it said. "Somebody overboard?"

"No. Worse," replied Nick. "Please come here and get me. I am Nick Carter, if that name means anything to you. Please——"

"All right. I'm coming. You can explain when you get aboard, if that is what you want to do, Mr. Carter. I'd just as soon do you a favor as any man I know—and then maybe, some day, you'll do me one."

The boat was turned in its own length. It came close to the pier and stopped, and Nick leaped safely into it.

"Now, my friend, whoever you are," he said breathlessly, "if you would do me the greatest favor I could ask at this moment, turn your head toward Pavonia—the Erie Railway—and get me there as quickly as this craft can do it."

"Oh, she can do it, all right. There is nothing faster in this harbor than *Starlight*. That is her name. Now we're off. See her go!" Then, after a short pause, he added: "So you are Nick Carter, eh?" and he laughed boisterously, so that the detective was for a moment startled.

"It's funny—mighty funny!" said the man, chuckling softly after the laugh was over. "It is about the rummest go I ever heard of. To think of my taking *you* across the river. Who are you after, Nick Carter?"

"I am trying to rescue two girls who are being carried away into captivity," replied the detective evasively.

"Is that so? Then I am with you to the end of the hawser. I don't suppose you have any idea who I am, eh?"

"No. And you need not tell me unless you wish to do so."

"Well, I guess I won't tell you. But you might just remember *Starlight*, which is the name of my boat, although it ain't painted on her anywhere. Some day maybe I'll want a favor of you, and, if I should, that'll be the password. See?"

"Yes. I won't forget."

"You can call me Bill, for to-night. That'll do as well as any other name."

"All right, Bill. Thank you."

"You said the Erie, didn't you, Carter?"

"Yes."

After that there was utter silence between them, for Nick had already guessed that the man who had accepted him as a passenger was not engaged in any honest trade. But he knew it was not wise to ask questions, and, besides, for the moment it made little difference to him who the man was, so long as he was conveying him rapidly toward the Jersey shore.

The boat was much swifter than any tug he could have found, and in what seemed a surprisingly short time they were in sight of their destination.

The moment they landed Nick leaped ashore, having first attempted to press a bill into the hand of the owner of the boat; but that odd character would have none of it.

"No, sirree," he said. "I'm right glad to do this for you. I'll wait here for you, too, if you want. I'd go with you, only I daren't leave the boat alone."

"All right; wait. I may have other passengers to take back with me. I wish you could go with me, but——"

He did not wait to finish, for a glance at his watch told him that it lacked only two minutes of half-past two.

He ran up the pier toward the station, for he knew that the special should be there, or near there, if anywhere.

The gateway under the shed was closed and locked, but he clambered over the sharp pickets and dropped safely on the other side; and then he ran on again, and presently cannoned into one of the night men on duty at the station.

"Where is that special?" he demanded, catching the man so that he did not fall.

"Yonder," said the man, pointing. "Just ready to pull out."

Nick leaped away again.

There was a hissing of steam as he drew near the car; and when he was just within reach of it, the wheels began to revolve, and the car to move forward.

But it started slowly, and he succeeded in grasping the rail of the observation platform. In an instant he had swung himself aboard; nor did he see that another figure than his own had seized the same rail on the other side and had also swung itself aboard the car but a second after him.

But Nick was already at the door of the car.

One glance inside told him that he was in time and that he had found what he sought; then he raised his right hand and seized the conductor's signal-cord and pulled it sharply; and the next instant the special came to a stop with a jerk.

And in that instant Nick had pulled the door open and sprang inside the car, entering it just as the three men it contained leaped to their feet to discover what was the matter, and why they had stopped so suddenly.

In that instant they found themselves looking into the muzzles of two revolvers that Nick Carter was holding at arm's length in front of him and pointing directly at them, the muzzles waving just a little so that they covered all three; and then Nick heard a voice behind him

—the voice of the strange character of the motor-boat—say:

"I've got 'em covered, too, Nick; and I'll let daylight, or electric light, into the first one that moves a hair."

"Hands up!" ordered Nick sternly, but smiling at the strange outcome of the affair; and then, while this tableau was being displayed, the train crew rushed into the car to discover why the air-whistle had been pulled.

The special did not leave Pavonia that night—or, rather, that morning; for half an hour later the motor-boat, called the *Starlight*, crossed again to the New York side, and deposited at the foot of Twenty-third Street three men and one woman prisoners, who were speedily transferred to a patrol-wagon and conveyed to a place of safe-keeping.

And Carmen Chum, and Clarice, looking like another Carmen, were taken to the home of the former, while Nick broke the news to Carmen of her father's death, for Clarice had thought it best not to tell her about it at once.

Bill, of the motor-boat, had still refused a money compensation for his services, saying merely that the day might come when he would ask a favor in return for what he had done.

This ends the story for one thing—which is interesting.

When Nick Carter bade Carmen and Clarice good-by on leaving them at their home, he said to the latter:

"Clarice, you would make a cracking good detective, and the day may come when I will call for your services again;" and she replied:

"When you require them, Mr. Carter, they are at your service."

THE END.

The next number, 527, will be "Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Case."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

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We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 200 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 196 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of the Medal Library. Any boy who has not read the Frank Merriwell stories will be glad to send a fine complete catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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